

# GREAT RECOVERY KEEPED WANDERERS IN THE TITLE RACE

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By STUART EARP Leytonstone 1, Wycombe Wanderers 2.

**WYCOMBE WANDERERS'** amazing ability to pull themselves back into a game when the chips are down kept them in the Rothmans Isthmian League title race on Wednesday night. A goal behind after 21 minutes, they staged another incredible recovery to clinch three invaluable points with goals in the 77th and 83rd minutes.

This was a game that just HAD to be won if Wanderers were to stand any chance of winning the championship. And for a long time at Granleigh Road, it seemed their hopes of league honours were fast disappearing. Struggling to find anything like their best form, the Blues' aspirations seemed to be on the wane.

Then, suddenly, a touch of magic from Mick Holifield saw them hit back to 1-1 and with just seven minutes left they pulled the killer goal out of the bag. It was a superb winner, fashioned by Tony Horseman's abundant skills and finished with a brilliant shot from Steve Perrin.

What these last minute finishes (Wycombe beat Ilford in the 94th minute the other day) are doing to their supporters, heaven knows. But the three points now puts additional pressure on the other two contenders Hendon and Bishops Stortford, whose manager Ted Hardy watched the game with obvious interest.

Swapping Keith Searle for Phil Wood as substitute, Wanderers fielded the same side

that drew 2-2 with Walton on Monday. But in contrast to that performance, Wycombe struggled. Although taking the initiative throughout the first half and going forward constantly, they rarely combined as a team.

#### HARD PRESSED

The goalkeeper and back four were hard pressed to keep down the challenge of John Brookes and Bill Ratty while the midfield trio were shadowed everywhere they went. Leytonstone never gave them or the front men an inch of room to move and were constantly harassing them. Wycombe's policy of slowing the game down and then attacking at speed was blunted severely.

It took nine minutes to produce Wycombe's first goal attempt but Perrin, put through by Keith Mead's header from Horseman's corner, lofted the ball over the crossbar. With Terry Reardon working over-

time in midfield, however, Wycombe were always pressing and Perrin again went close in the 17th minute when he picked up a Horseman through ball and drove just wide.

Although finding it difficult to breach the combination of Mike Smith and John Charles at the back, Wycombe looked the more positive side at this stage and it was against the run of play that Leytonstone took the lead with 21 minutes gone.

It was John Roseman who set up the goal, splitting Wycombe's defence with an astute through ball to Brookes on the left. The big centre forward ran clear and sent in a low cross that John Maskell could only parry. Ratty was there to thump the loose ball right into the roof of the net.

Wanderers hit back immediately with Pritchard driving straight at Murphy but after that, their distribution deteriorated badly. Paul Birdseye was the chief offender,

sending three crosses behind the goal.

Leytonstone, at this time, always looked likely to snatch another goal. Brookes drove wide after slipping Mead and then Ratty's snap-shot almost caught Maskell unawares — the goalkeeper having to dive at the foot of his post to keep the ball out.

As half time approached, Wycombe were still battling to break down the resilient Stones defence. The build-ups were usually promising but the final passes either went astray, were blocked or deflected. It seemed the Blues were in for a frustrating evening.

#### HIT UPRIGHT

Those thoughts continued in the second half when Ratty slammed the ball against Maskell's upright in the 49th minute. A goal then would surely have ended Wycombe's title hopes once and for all. For-

tunately for them, Ratty was marginally off target.

But with Leytonstone still making themselves first to the ball while Wycombe stood and waited, Wanderers looked anything like winners. Their supporters thought otherwise. I don't think they stopped cheering and encouraging for one minute in the second half and it was the fans, if anyone, who lifted the Blues out of the doldrums.

It was the signal for a gradual Wycombe rally. Grant's deep cross forced Murphy to tip the ball over the bar after 65 minutes and then Searle shot just wide. Then, in the 71st minute Murphy pulled off the save of the night. Pritchard, who was often back to rob Leytonstone of possession, met Horseman's corner on a near post run and powered the ball towards the top corner of the net, only for Murphy to fling himself across and palm out a certain goal.

Leytonstone's defence was still holding on and it seemed only a flash of individual brilliance would crack it. Holifield provided just that in the 77th minute. Receiving the ball outside the home penalty area, he raced into top gear. Weaving past two defenders at real speed, Mick cracked a great shot past Murphy on his favourite left foot to make it 1-1.

The equaliser, although welcome, was of little use on its own to Wycombe. They needed two — and victory. As the match entered the last ten minutes it didn't look possible. Then in the 83rd minute the three coach loads of supporters went wild as the Blues snatched a dramatic second goal to cap an amazing recovery.

The ball came out of defence to Horseman, who controlled it beautifully and rolled it into the path of Perrin, who had cut in from the flank. From just inside the box, a shot didn't look possible but Steve let fly with a fine first time effort that went all along the ground and veered into the far corner of the net for a sensational winner.

Fears of a Walton repetition in the last few minutes were unfounded. If anything it was Wycombe who finished the stronger side and few could deny them their glory on this occasion.

**LEYTONSTONE:** J. Murphy; L. Tilley, J. Charles, M. Smith, R. Hames; J. Smith, D. Ishmail, M. Roseman; W. Ratty, J. Brookes, B. Harvey. Sub. M. Lawrence (not used).

**WYCOMBE:** J. Maskell; P. Birdseye, K. Mead, D. Bullock, R. Grant; L. Pritchard, T. Reardon, M. Holifield; A. Horseman, K. Searle, S. Perrin. Sub. P. Wood (not used).

**Referee:** D. F. Pond (Chelmsford).

**Half time:** 1-0. **Goalscorers:** Wycombe — Holifield (77), Perrin (83). Leytonstone — Ratty (21).



STEVE PERRIN  
... dramatic winner

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#### ROTHMANS Isthmian League Division One

	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wycombe	1	26	9	6	93	34
B. Stortford	39	25	8	6	75	23
Hendon	40	23	14	4	61	20
Dulwich	42	22	11	9	71	38
L'head	40	22	12	8	78	42
Woking	40	22	8	12	69	51
L'stone	40	20	9	12	63	41
Ilford	41	20	8	13	60	41
Hayes	42	17	14	11	85	43
Walton	38	19	10	9	61	48
Oxford	41	14	16	11	42	46
Sutton	41	13	16	12	50	49
Barking	42	14	12	16	57	58
Kings	42	12	15	15	47	46
Tooting	42	14	9	19	57	62
Enfield	42	13	11	18	50	57
Hitchin	40	13	10	17	61	71
W'ston	42	11	13	18	46	62
Bromley	42	7	9	26	37	81
Clapton	42	8	31	36	128	27
St. Albans	42	4	7	31	30	92
Casuals	40	3	4	33	29	99